



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument
Florissant, Colorado

Administration Building Construction Environmental Assessment

January 2003



Administration Building Construction

Environmental Assessment

Summary

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (Monument) proposes to construct a new administration building near the farmhouse which serves as the Monument's interim Visitor Center. Administrative offices within the Monument are currently situated in two locations. The majority of offices are located in the 1980s pre-manufactured trailer near the Visitor Center and a few additional offices are in the farmhouse. The new administration building would replace the existing 1980s pre-manufactured trailer, and all administrative functions (offices) would be relocated to the new administration building.

The proposal to remove the trailer and replace it with a new building is needed in part to address human health and safety risks associated with both the existing administration trailer and the farmhouse. In particular, levels of rodent infestation in these facilities are unacceptably high, which increases the risk of employees being exposed to diseases carried by rodents. Both of these facilities also contain a number of structural deficiencies including: lack of foundations, sagging roofs, undersized electrical wiring, and a lack of fire detection and suppression systems. A new administration building would minimize these health and safety risks, and would also consolidate administrative functions into one permanent facility.

This Environmental Assessment evaluates two alternatives; a No Action Alternative and an action alternative. The No Action alternative describes the current condition if no administration building were constructed, while the action alternative addresses the removal of the existing building and construction of the new administration building in roughly the same area. The action alternative also addresses the use of temporary offices during construction of the new building, as well as other connected actions such as relocating utilities; improving the trail system in the project area; and dismantling the two yurt structures.

This Environmental Assessment has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) analyzes a reasonable range of alternatives to meet objectives of the proposal, 2) evaluates potential issues and impacts to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument's resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts. Resource topics that have been addressed in this document because the resultant impacts may be greater-than-minor include paleontological resources; visitor use and experience; and park operations. All other resource topics have been dismissed because the project would result in negligible or minor effects to those resources. No major effects are anticipated as a result of this project. Public scoping was conducted to assist with the development of this document and comments were received, mostly in support of the proposed project.

Public Comment

If you wish to comment on the Environmental Assessment, you may mail comments to the name and address below. This Environmental Assessment will be on public review for 30 days ending February 18, 2004. Please note that names and addresses of people who comment become part of the public record. We will make all submissions from organizations, businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses available for public inspection in their entirety. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this at the beginning of your comment.

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PURPOSE AND NEED

Introduction

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument (Monument) is located near the town of Florissant, in central Colorado (Figure 1). The Monument was established by an Act of Congress on August 25, 1969, and is managed by the National Park Service. The 6,000 acres of the Monument were set aside as part of the national park system to preserve, research, and interpret the excellently preserved fossil flora and fauna and related geologic sites and objects in order to advance our knowledge and understanding of these paleontological and geologic resources.

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment is to examine the environmental impacts associated with the proposal to construct a new administration building at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The new administration building would be constructed near the farmhouse that currently serves as the interim visitor center, and would replace the existing 1980s pre-manufactured administration building. This Environmental Assessment has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1508.9), and the National Park Service Director's Order (DO)-12 (*Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making*).

Background

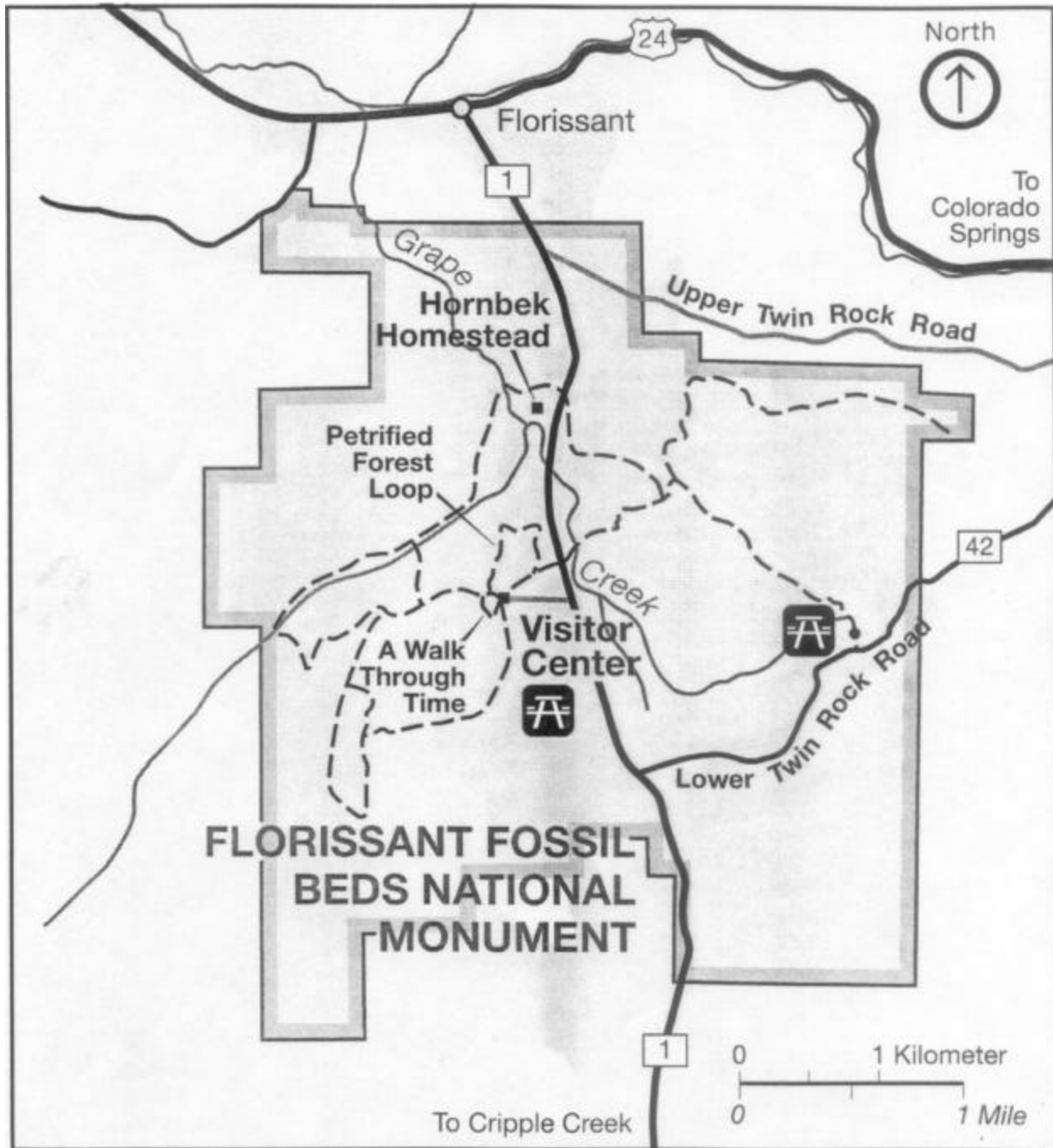
Administrative offices at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument are currently situated in two locations; in the 1980s pre-manufactured building located immediately behind the farmhouse that currently serves as the interim visitor center. The 1980s pre-manufactured building was originally constructed as a temporary administrative building before a more permanent administrative building could be constructed. This building contains half of employee offices; however, additional staffing requirements over the years have resulted in staff using space in the farmhouse for temporary offices as well. Therefore, the employee offices are currently split between two different buildings.

On a recent site visit, the National Park Service's Intermountain Region's Occupational Health Manager found the levels of mice infestation in the two buildings that are used for administrative offices unacceptably high. In the United States, rodents carry hantaviruses that cause hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a disease that can be transmitted to humans through the air. Rodents that carry the hantaviruses are endemic to general area, and while hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a relatively rare occurrence, there are life-threatening consequences if the disease is contracted. While the threat of hantaviruses can be managed relatively easily in outbuildings, the levels of infestation occurring in office workspace environments are not so easily mitigated. An epidemiologist with the State of Colorado's Department of Health and Environment has recommended that the Monument take immediate measures to mitigate for Hantavirus in the office work environment.

The existing trailer was never intended to serve as a permanent facility, but has housed employee offices and administrative functions for over 20 years. Time and wear on the structure has resulted in structural deficiencies including an overloaded electrical wiring system, non-compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act access requirements, an inadequate heating system, lack of a cooling system, a leaking roof, and unacceptable levels of rodent infestation. The recently completed condition assessment found over \$70,000 in maintenance deficiencies (far more than the worth of the building). Due to its age and condition, rodent-proofing the structure is likely to be difficult and expensive, and may not be feasible.

Figure 1 – Location of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Resource Protection Study Environmental Assessment

Figure 1 – Location of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

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Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposal is to provide a safe, healthy, and functional working environment for Monument staff in compliance with the goals and objectives of current plans and policy. Current plans and policy that pertain to this proposal include the 1985 Florissant Fossils Beds National Monument General Management Plan (NPS 1985), the 2004 Hantavirus Mitigation Plan for the Monument (NPS 2004), and the 2001 National Park Service Management Policies (NPS 2001). Following is more information pertaining to how this proposal meets the goals and objectives of these plans and policies:

- This project is consistent with the 1985 Florissant Fossils Beds National Monument General Management Plan which proposes the development of a permanent administrative facility. The General Management Plan identifies the actions, impacts, and mitigating measures necessary to resolve the issues facing the Monument. Many of these issues are the direct result of operating and occupying interim facilities which don't meet current health and safety codes.
- The new administration building would provide office and administrative space that complies with the Monument's 2004 Hantavirus Mitigation Plan. This plan recommends reducing current levels of rodent infestation in order to minimize the risk of an employee contracting an illness transmitted by rodents. The new administration building would be constructed on a foundation which should reduce the level of rodent infestation.
- The proposal is consistent with the goals and objectives of the *2001 National Park Service Management Policies* (NPS 2000) which states that major park facilities within park boundaries should be located so as to minimize impacts to park resources. The proposed site of the new administration building was identified to minimize harm to all park resources, particularly significant paleontological resources.

In addition to meeting the goals and objectives of these plans and policies, this project is needed to address the following management concerns:

- According to the National Park Service's Intermountain Region's Occupational Health Manager and the State of Colorado's Department of Health and Environment, the levels of rodent infestation in the existing buildings used for administrative offices are unacceptably high. These buildings do not meet state or National Park Service health and safety recommendations for employee work areas.
- The current administration building contains structural deficiencies including an overloaded electrical wiring system, non-compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act access requirements, an inadequate heating system, lack of a cooling system, a leaking roof, and unacceptable levels of rodent infestation.
- The current administration building does not have the capacity to accommodate all of the existing administrative functions (primarily employee offices) in one location.
- The current administration building was originally constructed as a temporary structure to be replaced by a permanent facility. The new administration building would be a permanent facility.

Project Objectives

Based on the Purpose and Need for the project and the scoping conducted with both the public and National Park Service staff, the following objectives have been identified to support the proposal for construction of a new administration building at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument:

1. Meet federal and state health and safety recommendations for employee work areas.
2. Consolidate administrative functions into one building.
3. Provide a permanent administration facility that meets current health and safety standards.
4. Provide a convenient location for park staff to work that facilitates the Monument's operations.
5. Identify a site for the new administration building that minimizes impacts to park resources and will not result in impairment to these resources.

Public Scoping

Scoping is a process to identify the resources that may be affected by a project proposal, and to explore possible alternative ways of achieving the proposal while minimizing adverse impacts. Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument conducted both internal scoping with appropriate National Park Service staff and external scoping with the public and interested/affected groups and agencies.

Internal scoping was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of professionals from Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument and the National Park Service Intermountain Support Office. Interdisciplinary team members met on September 30, 2003 to discuss the purpose and need for the project; various alternatives; potential environmental impacts; past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects that may have cumulative effects; and possible mitigation measures. Over the course of the project, team members also conducted a site visit to view and evaluate the proposed sites for the new administration building.

External scoping was initiated with the distribution of a scoping letter to inform the public of the proposal to construct a new administration building, and to generate input on the preparation of this Environmental Assessment. The scoping letter dated October 17, 2003 was mailed to over 150 residents in the Florissant, Woodland Park, Divide, and Cripple Creek areas including landowners adjacent to the Monument. In addition, the scoping letter was mailed to various federal and state agencies, affiliated Native American tribes, local governments, and local news organizations. Scoping information was also posted on the Monument's website.

During the 30-day scoping period, approximately twenty-two public responses were received. The majority of respondents were neutral about the construction of a new building, but suggested that physical, biological, or chemical extermination may help resolve the rodent infestation problem. This alternative was examined by the interdisciplinary team and ultimately dismissed as not meeting the other objectives of the project, particularly resolving structural deficiencies in the existing administration building (see also *Impact Topics Dismissed from Further Analysis* in Chapter 2.0 Alternatives). The remaining responses included some in favor of the project, some opposed to the project, and some requesting more project information. In addition to the public responses, two Native American tribes responded with no objection to the proposed project and a request to be kept informed of the project's progress. More information regarding scoping can be found in *Comments and Coordination*.

Impact Topics Retained for Further Analysis

Impact topics for this project have been identified on the basis of federal laws, regulations, and orders; National Park Service *2001 Management Policies*; and National Park Service knowledge of resources at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Impact topics that are carried forward for further analysis in this Environmental Assessment are listed below along with the reasons why the impact topic is further analyzed. For each of these topics, the following text also describes the existing setting or baseline conditions (i.e. affected environment) within the project area. This information will be used to analyze impacts against the current conditions of the project area in the *Environmental Consequences* chapter.

Paleontological Resources

According to *2001 Management Policies*, paleontological resources (fossils), including both organic and mineralized remains in body or trace form, will be protected, preserved, and managed for public education, interpretation, and scientific research (NPS 2000). The proposed site for the construction of the new administration building is located on the surface of the lower mudstone unit of the Florissant Formation, which contains abundant petrified wood. The proposed site is within the area of the Florissant Petrified Forest, which includes many large *in situ* redwood stumps. These are among the most important of Florissant's paleontological resources.

In order to assess and mitigate the potential impact of subsurface disturbance to paleontological resources during construction activity, the site was evaluated by the Monument's paleontologist in November 2003. The sampling area encompassed the footprint of the new administration building and all other areas that will undergo excavation for this project including utility corridors. Testing for paleontological resources occurred by drilling holes at four-foot intervals to a depth of approximately 40 inches, and examining the materials from those holes. Roughly 1,000 sites were sampled in an 8,000 square foot area.

The results of this testing included a total of five locations of highly concentration petrified wood at less than 40 inches from the ground surface within the study area. Two of these concentrations are located within the footprint of the new administration building, and no other concentrations are known to exist within other areas that will be excavated during this project. The two concentrations of petrified wood within the proposed footprint of the new building were identified at depths of 9 and 22 inches. Because the potential exists for excavation and construction to encounter significant paleontological resources, this topic has been retained for further analysis in the remainder of this document.

Visitor Use and Experience

According to *2001 Management Policies*, the enjoyment of park resources and values by people is part of the fundamental purpose of all park units (NPS 2000). The National Park Service is committed to providing appropriate, high quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy the parks, and will maintain within the parks an atmosphere that is open, inviting, and accessible to every segment of society. Further, the National Park Service will provide opportunities for forms of enjoyment that are uniquely suited and appropriate to the superlative natural and cultural resources found in the parks. The National Park Service *2001 Management Policies* also state that scenic views and visual resources are considered highly valued associated characteristics that the National Park Service should strive to protect (NPS 2000).

The average visitor length of stay at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument is 1.2 hours. The primary visitor activity is touring the farmhouse which serves as the interim visitor center and the petrified Sequoia stumps which are situated under protective shelters nearby. Approximately 95% of the Monument's 80,000 annual visitors view these stumps. Visitors may also visit one of the two yurt structures near the farmhouse, which contains an interpretive video. The other yurt structure in this area is not open to the public for security reasons because it contains paleontological materials yet to be curated.

The current administration trailer is located between the farmhouse and the two yurt structures, and is not open to the general public. A number of social trails leads visitors and employees between all of these buildings and the stump shelters. The current administration trailer is not clearly identified as an employees only area, and in the past, some visitors have mistaken the building as a visitor area. Visually, when visitors arrive at the Monument, they see the farmhouse which serves as the visitor center with the current administration trailer and the two yurts just to the southwest. Because the proposed project will functionally and visually reconfigure the area adjacent to the visitor center which is currently used by visitors, the topic of visitor use and experience has been carried forward for further analysis.

Park Operations

The administrative functions for the Monument are currently located in two separate buildings. While the majority of employee offices are located in the existing administration trailer (roughly 5-10 offices), the farmhouse also contains 2-3 employee offices. In order for employees to meet with other employees in another building requires that they traverse back and forth between the two buildings. Kitchen space for employee use is also only located in the existing administrative building.

One of the two yurts in the project area is used by Monument staff for administrative purposes. This yurt is being temporarily used to store paleontological materials until they can be appropriately curated. This building is not open to the public, unlike the other yurt in the area which is open to the public and includes a seating area for the public to view a video.

On a recent site visit, the National Park Service's Intermountain Region's Occupational Health Manager found the levels of rodent infestation in the existing administration trailer and the farmhouse unacceptably high. Employees routinely complain of rodent sightings and droppings in and around the existing office workspaces. Rodents have the potential to carry hantaviruses or other diseases. Hantaviruses in particular can be contracted by humans in the form of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a deadly disease transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings, or saliva. Humans can contract the disease when they breathe in aerosolized virus. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome was first recognized in 1993 and has since been identified throughout the United States (CDC 2003). Although rare, hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is potentially deadly.

Construction of a new administration building in addition to reconfiguring the yurts and social trails in the project area will have a measurable effect on the Monument's staff and how/where they conduct their work. For these reasons, the topic of park operations has been carried forward for further analysis in this document.

Impact Topics Dismissed From Further Analysis

Some impact topics have been dismissed from further consideration, as listed below. The rationale for dismissing these specific topics is stated for each resource.

Topography, Geology, and Soils

According to the National Park Service's *2001 Management Policies*, the National Park Service will preserve and protect geologic resources and features from adverse effects of human activity, while allowing natural processes to continue (NPS 2000). These policies also state that the National Park Service will strive to understand and preserve the soil resources of park units and to prevent, to the extent possible, the unnatural erosion, physical removal, or contamination of the soil, or its contamination of other resources.

The proposed construction of a new administration building would be located in an area of the Monument that does not contain significant topographic or geologic features. Further, the general location for the new administration building has been previously disturbed by past construction of utilities, the temporary administration building, and the two existing yurts. Minor modifications of the topography would be

required to facilitate a level surface on which to construct the building which would have a negligible to minor effect to the topography of this area. The building construction would also require excavation which would displace and disturb soils, primarily in the footprint of the new building. Soils may also be disturbed and compacted on a temporary basis in the locations used to access the construction site as well as in the immediate area of the temporary staff offices (trailer) that would be used until construction of the new building is complete. Removal of the existing administration building would also disturb soils.

Given that there are no significant topographic or geologic features in the project area, and that the area has been previously disturbed, the proposed actions would result in negligible to minor, temporary and permanent adverse effects to topography, geology, and soils. Because these effects are minor or less in degree, this topic has been dismissed from further analysis in this document.

Vegetation

According to the National Park Service's *2001 Management Policies*, the National Park Service strives to maintain all components and processes of naturally evolving park unit ecosystems, including the natural abundance, diversity, and ecological integrity of plants (NPS 2000). The existing vegetation in the project area primarily consists of grasses including Arizona fescue, mountain muhly, and Junegrass. The most abundant forbs are pussytoes, fringed sage, asters, and gumweed. The project area is surrounded on the south side by ponderosa pine trees and other conifers, and a small number of ponderosa pine trees exists in the project area.

Vegetation would be displaced, disturbed, and/or compacted in the areas of construction particularly in the footprint of the new building and along the utility line corridors. Approximately 3 to 10 trees would be removed from these areas as well. Vegetation would also be disturbed and displaced when the current administration building is removed and during occupation of a temporary employee facility (trailer) on the north side of the administration building. Construction of new trails to provide access to the newly situated building would also disturb vegetation. Disturbed areas would be revegetated and rehabilitated following construction; therefore, removal and/or disturbance of vegetation in the project area is expected to result in negligible to minor adverse impacts to vegetation. Because these effects are minor or less in degree, this topic has been dismissed from further analysis in this document.

Wildlife

According to the National Park Service's *2001 Management Policies*, the National Park Service strives to maintain all components and processes of naturally evolving park unit ecosystems, including the natural abundance, diversity, and ecological integrity of animals (NPS 2000). Wildlife commonly found in the Monument include mule deer, elk, black bear, coyotes, porcupines, badgers, weasels, chipmunks, ground squirrels, Abert's squirrels, cottontail rabbits, bats, mice, and over 100 species of birds. There are also numerous insect species and an occasional garter snake. The project area is in a heavily used visitor service area and hence is little used by the larger animals.

The location of the proposed administration building is in a previously disturbed area of the Monument that contains little to no water, minimal vegetation, and is generally flat with no major geologic features. The presence of humans, human-related activities, and structures have removed or displaced much of the native wildlife habitat in the project area which has limited the number and variety of wildlife occurrences in the area. Some smaller wildlife such as rodents, reptiles, and amphibians and their habitat would be displaced or eliminated during construction of the new administration building and removal of the current administration building and yurt structures. Disturbed areas would be revegetated and rehabilitated following construction which would result in a negligible to minor adverse impact to the wildlife and wildlife habitat in the immediate area of construction.

During construction, noise would also increase which may disturb wildlife in the general area. Construction-related noise would be temporary, and existing sound conditions would resume following

construction activities. Therefore, the temporary noise from construction would have a negligible to minor adverse effect on wildlife.

Rodents are known to exist in the project area, particularly in and around the inhabited structures including the existing administration building. Previous attempts to eradicate the rodents from the buildings have been futile, and their occurrences in employee work areas have increased in the past few years. Rodents living in and around the current administration building and the two yurt structures would likely be displaced or eliminated during removal of these structures. This would have a negligible to minor impact on the rodent population in the area.

Because the effects to wildlife and wildlife habitat from the proposed project are minor or less in degree, this topic has been dismissed from further analysis in this document.

Special Status Species

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires examination of impacts on all federally-listed threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires all federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (or designated representative) to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by the agency does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or critical habitats. In addition, the *2001 Management Policies* and Director's Order 77 *Natural Resources Management Guidelines* require the National Park Service to examine the impacts on federal candidate species, as well as state-listed threatened, endangered, candidate, rare, declining, and sensitive species (NPS 2000). For the purposes of this analysis, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife were contacted with regards to federally- and state-listed species to determine those species that could potentially occur on or near the project area.

A letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dated January 15, 2004 indicated that there are not records of threatened or endangered species in the project area (USFWS, January 15, 2004).

Further protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, kill, capture, possess, buy, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird, including the feathers or other parts, nests, eggs, or migratory bird products. In addition, this act serves to protect environmental conditions for migratory birds from pollution or other ecosystem degradations. Some migratory birds may be potential transients of the general area, but the immediate project area contains little to no suitable habitat for migratory birds. There are no known nesting sites in this area, and these lands are not vital for foraging or roosting. Construction-related noise could potentially disturb transient bird species, but these adverse impacts would be 1) temporary, lasting only as long as construction, and 2) negligible, because suitable habitat for transient birds is found throughout the region.

Because no threatened, endangered, or other species of concern are known to occur in the project area, the topic of threatened and endangered species was dismissed from further analysis.

Water Resources

National Park Service policies require protection of water quality consistent with the Clean Water Act. The purpose of the Clean Water Act is to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters". To enact this goal, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been charged with evaluating federal actions that result in potential degradation of waters of the United States and issuing permits for actions consistent with the Clean Water Act. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also has responsibility for oversight and review of permits and actions, which affect waters of the United States.

The proposed project area does not contain surface waters, and is mostly dry, except for periodic runoff during storm events. Water quality, water quantity, and drinking water are not expected to be affected by the project. The size of the new administration building's footprint (approximately 2,500 square feet)

would increase the amount of impervious surface in the area, which could possibly increase the erosion potential of the area; however, removal of the existing administration building and two yurt structures should offset or mitigate this effect. To further assist with erosion and water quality, disturbed areas would be revegetated and recontoured following construction. Because the project results in negligible effects to water resources, this topic has been dismissed from further consideration.

Wetlands

For regulatory purposes under the Clean Water Act, the term wetlands means "those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas."

Executive Order 11990 *Protection of Wetlands* requires federal agencies to avoid, where possible, adversely impacting wetlands. Further, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to prohibit or regulate, through a permitting process, discharge or dredged or fill material or excavation within waters of the United States. National Park Service policies for wetlands as stated in *2001 Management Policies* and Director's Order 77-1 *Wetlands Protection*, strive to prevent the loss or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. In accordance with DO 77-1 *Wetlands Protection*, proposed actions that have the potential to adversely impact wetlands must be addressed in a Statement of Findings for wetlands.

No wetlands are located in the project area; therefore, a Statement of Findings for wetlands will not be prepared, and the impact topic of wetlands has been dismissed.

Floodplains

Executive Order 11988 *Floodplain Management* requires all federal agencies to avoid construction within the 100-year floodplain unless no other practicable alternative exists. The National Park Service under *2001 Management Policies* and Director's Order 77-2 *Floodplain Management* will strive to preserve floodplain values and minimize hazardous floodplain conditions. According to Director's Order 77-2 *Floodplain Management*, certain construction within a 100-year floodplain requires preparation of a Statement of Findings for floodplains.

The project area for the new administration building is not located within a 100-year floodplain. Therefore a Statement of Findings for floodplains will not be prepared, and the topic of floodplains has been dismissed.

Archeological Resources

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended in 1992 (16 USC 470 *et seq.*); the National Park Service's Director's Order 28 *Cultural Resource Management Guideline*; and National Park Service *2001 Management Policies* (NPS 2000b) require the consideration of impacts on historic properties that are listed on or eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the nation's inventory of historic places and the national repository of documentation on property types and their significance. The above-mentioned policies and regulations require federal agencies to coordinate consultation with State Historic Preservation Officers regarding the potential effects to properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Park Service, as steward of many of America's most important cultural resources, is charged to preserve historic properties for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Management decisions and activities throughout the National Park System must reflect awareness of the irreplaceable nature of these resources. The National Park Service will protect and manage cultural resources in its custody through effective research, planning, and stewardship and in accordance with the policies and principles contained in the *2001 Management Policies* and the appropriate Director's Orders.

For the purposes of the following discussion, cultural resources include archeological resources, historic structures, cultural landscapes, ethnographic resources, and museum collections. Consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (Colorado Historical Society) affirmed that the proposed project will not affect any historic properties. A letter dated December 16, 2003 confirms the “no historic properties affected” determination under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (CHS 2003).

In addition to the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service *2001 Management Policies* (NPS 2000), the National Park Service's Director's Order 28B *Archeology*, affirms a long-term commitment to the appropriate investigation, documentation, preservation, interpretation, and protection of archeological resources inside units of the National Park System. As one of the principal stewards of America's heritage, the National Park Service is charged with the preservation of the commemorative, educational, scientific, and traditional cultural values of archeological resources for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. Archeological resources are nonrenewable and irreplaceable, so it is important that all management decisions and activities throughout the National Park System reflect a commitment to the conservation of archeological resources as elements of our national heritage.

The proposed location for the administration building was previously surveyed, and no archeological sites were identified in the immediate project area (CHS 2003). Therefore, the proposed project area is not expected to contain archeological deposits; however, appropriate steps would be taken to protect any archeological resources that are inadvertently discovered during construction. Because the project will not disturb any known archeological sites, the affect of the project on archeological resources is expected to be negligible, and this topic has been dismissed from further analysis.

Historic Structures

The term “historic structures” refers to both historic and prehistoric structures, which are defined as constructions that shelter any form of human habitation or activity. The project area does not contain any historic structures that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Immediately adjacent to the project area is the visitor center which is a historic 1924 farm house, and it was determined to be not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Although the employee offices would be relocated out of the visitor center/historic farm house into the new administration building, this action is not expected to have a measurable effect on this structure. Therefore, the topic of historic structures has been dismissed from further consideration.

Ethnographic Resources

Per the National Park Service's Director's Order 28 *Cultural Resource Management*, ethnographic resources are defined as any site, structure, object, landscape, or natural resource feature assigned traditional legendary, religious, subsistence, or other significance in the cultural system of a group traditionally associated with it. According to DO-28 and Executive Order 13007 on sacred sites, the National Park Service should try to preserve and protect ethnographic resources.

Ethnographic resources are not known to exist in the proposed project area based on the lack of cultural materials present. In addition, Native American tribes traditionally associated the Monument were apprised of the proposed project in a letter dated October 17, 2003, and two responses were received from these tribes. These responses confirmed their cultural affiliations with the area, but indicated that no impacts to significant ethnographic resources are expected. Therefore, this topic has been dismissed from further consideration.

Cultural Landscapes

According to the National Park Service's Director's Order 28 *Cultural Resource Management Guideline*, a cultural landscape is a reflection of human adaptation and use of natural resources, and is often expressed in the way land is organized and divided, patterns of settlement, land use, systems of circulation, and the types of structures that are built. Although a cultural landscape inventory has not been conducted for the Monument, the features within the general project area including the existing administration prefabricated building and two yurt structures are temporary in nature and not likely to contribute to a significant cultural landscape. Therefore, this topic has been dismissed from further consideration.

Museum Collections

According to Director's Order 24 *Museum Collections*, the National Park Service requires the consideration of impacts on museum collections (historic artifacts, natural specimens, and archival and manuscript material), and provides further policy guidance, standards, and requirements for preserving, protecting, documenting, and providing access to, and use of, National Park Service museum collections. Some paleontological specimens are currently housed in one of the yurt structures in the project area. These specimens would be relocated to another building within the Monument that is being used as a temporary curatorial facility. The yurt structure would be dismantled, and would not likely be erected again until a function for it is identified. The paleontological specimens would be moved in consultation with the Monument's paleontologist, and this action is not anticipated to have measurable effects to these items. Therefore, the topic of museum collections has been dismissed from further consideration.

Air Quality

The Clean Air Act of 1963 (42 U.S.C. 7401 *et seq.*) was established to promote the public health and welfare by protecting and enhancing the nation's air quality. The act establishes specific programs that provide special protection for air resources and air quality related values associated with National Park Service units. Section 118 of the Clean Air Act requires a park unit to meet all federal, state, and local air pollution standards. Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument is designated as a Class II air quality area under the Clean Air Act. A Class II designation indicates the maximum allowable increase in concentrations of pollutants over baseline concentrations of sulfur dioxide and particulate matter as specified in Section 163 of the Clean Air Act. Further, the Clean Air Act provides that the federal land manager has an affirmative responsibility to protect air quality related values (including visibility, plants, animals, soils, water quality, cultural resources, and visitor health) from adverse pollution impacts (EPA 2000).

Construction activities such as hauling materials and operating heavy equipment could result in temporary increases of vehicle exhaust, emissions, and fugitive dust in the general project area. Any exhaust, emissions, and fugitive dust generated from construction activities would be temporary and localized, and would likely dissipate rapidly because air stagnation at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument is rare. Overall, the project could result in a negligible degradation of local air quality, and such effects would be temporary, lasting only as long as construction. The Class II air quality designation for Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument would not be affected by the proposal. Therefore, air quality has been dismissed as an impact topic.

Soundscape Management

In accordance with 2001 *Management Policies* and Director's Order 47 *Sound Preservation and Noise Management*, an important component of the National Park Service's mission is the preservation of natural soundscapes associated with national park units (NPS 2000). Natural soundscapes exist in the absence of human-caused sound. The natural ambient soundscape is the aggregate of all the natural sounds that occur in park units, together with the physical capacity for transmitting natural sounds. Natural sounds occur within and beyond the range of sounds that humans can perceive and can be transmitted through air, water, or solid materials. The frequencies, magnitudes, and durations of human-

caused sound considered acceptable varies among National Park Service units as well as potentially throughout each park unit, being generally greater in developed areas and less in undeveloped areas.

The proposed location for the new administration building and all construction activity would occur in the what can be considered the developed zone of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Existing sounds in this area are most often generated from vehicular traffic (visitors and employees entering/leaving the Monument), people, climate controls on the buildings, some wildlife such as birds, and wind. Sound generated by the long-term operation of the administration building may include climate controls such as heating or air conditioning units and people using the building. Because the area already contains man-made noises, the long-term operation of the building is not expected to appreciably increase the noise levels in the general area.

During construction, human-caused sounds would likely increase due to construction activities, equipment, vehicular traffic, and construction crews. Any sounds generated from construction would be temporary, lasting only as long as the construction activity is generating the sounds, and would have a negligible to minor adverse impact on visitors and employees. Therefore, the topic of soundscape management was dismissed as an impact topic.

Lightscape Management

In accordance with *2001 Management Policies*, the National Park Service strives to preserve natural ambient landscapes, which are natural resources and values that exist in the absence of human caused light (NPS 2000). Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument strives to limit the use of artificial outdoor lighting to that which is necessary for basic safety requirements. The Monument also strives to ensure that all outdoor lighting is shielded to the maximum extent possible, to keep light on the intended subject and out of the night sky. The visitor center and the existing administration building are the primary sources of light in the Monument.

The proposed action may incorporate minimal exterior lighting on the administration building, but the lighting would be directed toward the intended subject with appropriate shielding mechanisms, and would be placed in only those areas where lighting is needed for safety reasons. The amount and extent of exterior lighting on the administration building would have negligible effects on the existing outside lighting or natural night sky of the area; therefore, this topic has been dismissed.

Socioeconomics

The proposed action would neither change local and regional land use nor appreciably impact local businesses or other agencies. Implementation of the proposed action could provide a negligible beneficial impact to the economies of nearby Florissant, Colorado, as well Teller County due to minimal increases in employment opportunities for the construction workforce and revenues for local businesses and governments generated from these additional construction activities and workers. Any increase in workforce and revenue, however, would be temporary and negligible, lasting only as long as construction. Because the impacts to the socioeconomic environment would be negligible, this topic has been dismissed.

Prime and Unique Farmlands

The Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981, as amended, requires federal agencies to consider adverse effects to prime and unique farmlands that would result in the conversion of these lands to non-agricultural uses. Prime or unique farmland is classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and is defined as soil that particularly produces general crops such as common foods, forage, fiber, and oil seed; unique farmland produces specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts. According to the NRCS, the project area does not contain prime or unique farmlands. Therefore, the topic of prime and unique farmlands has been dismissed.

Indian Trust Resources

Secretarial Order 3175 requires that any anticipated impacts to Indian trust resources from a proposed project or action by the Department of Interior agencies be explicitly addressed in environmental documents. The federal Indian trust responsibility is a legally enforceable fiduciary obligation on the part of the United States to protect tribal lands, assets, resources, and treaty rights, and it represents a duty to carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes.

There are no Indian trust resources at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The lands comprising the Monument are not held in trust by the Secretary of the Interior for the benefit of Indians due to their status as Indians. Therefore, the project would have negligible effects on Indian trust resources, and this topic was dismissed as an impact topic.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 *General Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* requires all federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities. Because the new administration facility would be available for use by all park staff regardless of race or income, and the construction workforces would not be hired based on their race or income, the proposed action would not have disproportionate health or environmental effects on minorities or low-income populations or communities. Therefore, environmental justice has been dismissed as an impact topic in this document.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

During September of 2003, an interdisciplinary team of National Park Service employees met for the purpose of developing project alternatives. This meeting resulted in the definition of project objectives as described in the *Purpose and Need*, and a list of alternatives that could potentially meet these objectives. A total of five action alternatives and the No Action Alternative were originally identified for this project. Of these, four of the action alternatives were dismissed from further consideration for various reasons, as described later in this chapter. One action alternative and the No Action Alternative are carried forward for further evaluation in this Environmental Assessment. A summary table comparing alternative components is presented at the end of this chapter.

Alternatives Carried Forward

Alternative A – No Action

Under this alternative, the administration building would not be constructed. The existing farmhouse and administration trailer would continue to provide employee offices and other administrative functions. The few employee offices located in the farmhouse would remain in their present location. Structural problems with the existing facilities would not be repaired, and rodent control would not be sought. The two yurt structures would not be relocated and the trail system in the project area would not be improved. Should the No-Action Alternative be selected, the National Park Service would respond to future needs and conditions of the artifact storage without major actions or changes in present course of action. See Figure 2 for a plan of the existing conditions.

Alternative B – Construct New Administration Building

This alternative consists of constructing a new administration building located in approximately the same location as the existing administration trailer, but slightly more to the south, southwest. (Figure 3). This general area has been previously disturbed by the construction of utility corridors, trails, and yurt structures. The existing administration trailer would be disposed of off-site. The following text further describes the components of Alternative B:

- **Building Features** – The new administration building would be a modular construction, approximately 2,700 square feet in size. Rough dimensions for the new administration building are 36 feet wide by 76 feet long, which is slightly more than twice the size of the existing administration trailer in order to accommodate all employee offices and administrative functions. The interior of the building would include employee offices, general work space(s), a breakroom, toilets, and some storage space; however, the building would be handicapped accessible. The administration building would be equipped with a modern climate control system, which would include heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC). A security system would be installed to protect from unauthorized entry, in addition to a fire protection system for the entire building, which would consist of smoke and heat detection alarms and sprinklers. In an effort to “green the parks”, construction of the new building would enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources, to the extent possible.
- **Use/Operation of the Facility** – The administration building would primarily be used by Monument employees for administrative functions. All employee offices would be located in the new administration building. The current employee offices located in the farmhouse would be relocated to the new building. Functions for the space in the farmhouse would be determined in the future, but would likely relate to the management of visitor services. The Monument would not offer general visitor services in the new administration building, however the building would be open for park-specific business.

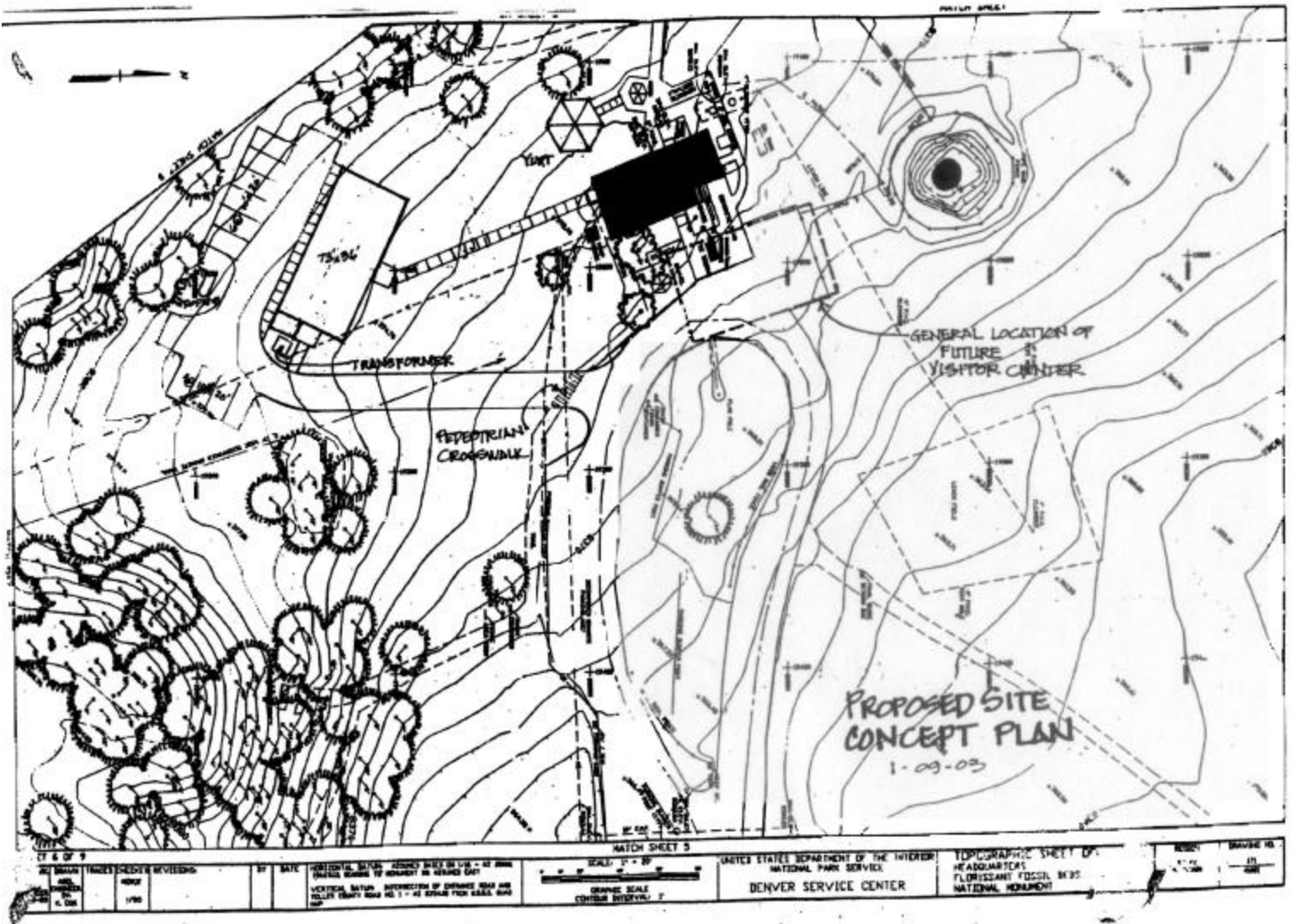
- **Utilities** - The building would be served by existing utilities located near the site, including water, sewer, electric, and gas. Connecting these existing utilities to the administration building would likely entail excavation and placement of additional underground piping/wiring to connect with these utilities.
- **Access** - Access to the new administration building would be via a system of trails (footpaths) leading to/from the farmhouse and parking area. The current configuration of trails would be improved to alleviate confusion for employees and visitors. Signs may also be erected to direct employees and visitors around these trails.
- **Parking** - The site of the new administration building is located near an existing parking lot that is currently used by employees. No additional parking for employees would be necessary. A new parking area for government vehicles will be developed behind the new administration building to replace the parking area in front of the farmhouse.
- **Revegetation** – The existing trees in the project area would be preserved to the extent possible; however, roughly 3 to 10 trees may be removed during construction. All areas disturbed by construction of the new administration building would be revegetated and recontoured to the style of the native landscape. Native vegetation, rocks, or other natural features would be used, as appropriate.
- **Pest Control** – Pest control would likely not be needed in the new administration building due to its structural integrity. However, if rodents or other pests do enter the new building, they would be removed using biological, physical, or chemical controls.
- **Temporary Offices and Yurts** – A temporary office facility (trailer) would be erected immediately north of the visitor center to provide office space for employees during construction of the new administration building. This trailer would be removed following completion of the new building. A 30-foot diameter yurt would be relocated to the rear of the farmhouse to provide visitor services.
- **Construction Staging** – To implement this alternative, an area near the new administration building would be used for construction staging, material stockpiling, and equipment storage. This area would likely be located in a previously disturbed area, away from visitor use areas. Portions of the existing parking lot may be used for construction purposes as well.

This alternative is based on preliminary designs and best information available at the time of this writing. Specific distances, areas, and layouts used to describe the alternative are only estimates and could change during final site design. If changes during final site design are not consistent with the intent and effects of the selected alternative, then additional compliance would be completed, as appropriate.

Figure 3 – Alternative B, Construct New Administration Building

Administration Building Construction Environmental Assessment

Figure 3 – Alternative B, Construct New Administration Building



Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument

Alternatives Considered and Dismissed

The following four alternatives were considered for project implementation, but were ultimately dismissed from further analysis (the last bullet describes two alternatives). Reasons for their dismissal are provided in the following alternative descriptions.

- **Professional Extermination of Rodents** – This alternative was considered to alleviate the problems associated with rodents in and around the existing administration facilities. It consisted of using biological, physical, or chemical procedures to exterminate rodents. During public scoping, a few members of the public proposed this alternative as a solution instead of having to construct a new building. Pest control has been used in the past, but has not eliminated the problem or safety concerns. This alternative also does not address the structural deficiencies associated with the existing farmhouse and administration trailer, nor does it offer a solution for consolidating all employees into one work area. Therefore, this alternative was dismissed because it only partially meets the purpose and need for the project and the project objectives.
- **Utilizing Other Existing Space** – This alternative consisted of removing the existing administration trailer and finding other spaces to use either within or outside the Monument, without having to construct a new building. Finding space outside the Monument to use for administrative purposes was considered but eliminated because many of the employees' positions are directly related to providing visitor services and are required to be on-site. Therefore, finding space outside the Monument would not be feasible for many of the employees' positions. Finding alternate space to use within the Monument was also considered, but ultimately eliminated. Therefore, the alternative of utilizing other spaces within or outside the Monument was eliminated for feasibility reasons and not meeting the project's objectives.
- **Alternative Locations for a New Administration Building** – Two alternate locations were considered for constructing a new administration building. One location was situated in the picnic area, approximately 200 feet south of the existing parking lot. This area is on a slight hill and screened by trees. The other location that was considered was approximately 50 feet south of the existing parking lot, and is closer in proximity to the visitor center. Both of these alternatives were dismissed from further consideration because of their locations in relation to existing utilities. Connecting to existing utilities from either of these locations would have resulted in higher costs and greater environmental impacts.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures have been developed to minimize the degree and/or severity of adverse effects, and would be implemented during construction of the action alternative, as needed:

- To minimize the amount of ground disturbance, staging and stockpiling areas would be located in previously disturbed sites, away from visitor use areas to the extent possible. All staging and stockpiling areas would be returned to pre-construction conditions following construction.
- The fossilized wood concentration located within the footprint of the new administration building at a depth of 9-inches would not be disturbed and incorporated into the crawlspace of the structure. To minimize impacts to unknown paleontological specimens during construction, the Monument's paleontologist would monitor all ground disturbing activities. If any paleontological materials are inadvertently discovered during construction, all construction activities would be halted until the materials can be analyzed and recovered by the Monument's paleontologist and his staff.
- Construction zones would be identified and fenced with construction tape, snow fencing, or some similar material prior to any construction activity. The fencing would define the construction zone and confine activity to the minimum area required for construction. All protection measures would be

clearly stated in the construction specifications and workers would be instructed to avoid conducting activities beyond the construction zone as defined by the construction zone fencing.

- Employees and construction crews would be required to park in the back of the lot to ensure enough capacity and easier access to the Monument for visitors.
- Revegetation and recontouring of disturbed areas would take place following construction, and would be designed to minimize the visual intrusion of the structure. Revegetation efforts would strive to reconstruct the natural spacing, abundance, and diversity of native plant species using native species. All disturbed areas would be restored as nearly as possible to pre-construction conditions shortly after construction activities are completed. Weed control methods would be implemented to minimize the introduction of noxious weeds. Some trees may be removed, but other existing vegetation at the site would not be disturbed to the extent possible.
- Because disturbed soils are susceptible to erosion until revegetation takes place, standard erosion control measures such as silt fences and/or sand bags would be used to minimize any potential soil erosion.
- Fugitive dust generated by construction would be controlled by spraying water on the construction site, if necessary.
- To reduce noise and emissions, construction equipment would not be permitted to idle for long periods of time.
- To minimize possible petrochemical leaks from construction equipment, the contractor would regularly monitor and check construction equipment to identify and repair any leaks.
- Construction workers and supervisors would be informed about special status species. Contract provisions would require the cessation of construction activities if a species were discovered in the project area, until park staff re-evaluates the project. This would allow modification of the contract for any protection measures determined necessary to protect the discovery.
- Should construction unearth previously undiscovered cultural resources, work would be stopped in the area of any discovery and the Monument would consult with the state historic preservation officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, as necessary, according to §36 CFR 800.13, *Post Review Discoveries*. In the unlikely event that human remains are discovered during construction, provisions outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) would be followed.
- The National Park Service would ensure that all contractors and subcontractors are informed of the penalties for illegally collecting artifacts or intentionally damaging paleontological materials, archeological sites, or historic properties. Contractors and subcontractors would also be instructed on procedures to follow in case previously unknown paleontological or archeological resources are uncovered during construction.
- To minimize the potential for impacts to park visitors, variations on construction timing may be considered. One option includes conducting the majority of the work in the off-season (winter) or shoulder seasons. Another option includes implementing daily construction activity curfews such as not operating construction equipment between the hours of 6 PM to 7 AM in summer (May – September), and 6 PM to 8 AM in the winter (October – April). The National Park Service would determine this in consultation with the contractor.
- Construction workers and supervisors would be informed about the special sensitivity of Monument's values, regulations, and appropriate housekeeping.

- According to *2001 Management Policies*, the National Park Service would strive to construct facilities with sustainable designs and systems to minimize potential environmental impacts. Development would not compete with or dominate Monument's features, or interfere with natural processes, such as the seasonal migration of wildlife or hydrologic activity associated with wetlands. To the extent possible, the design and management of facilities would emphasize environmental sensitivity in construction, use of nontoxic materials, resource conservation, recycling, and integration of visitors with natural and cultural settings. The National Park Service also reduces energy costs, eliminates waste, and conserves energy resources by using energy-efficient and cost-effective technology. Energy efficiency is incorporated into the decision-making process during the design and acquisition of buildings, facilities, and transportation systems that emphasize the use of renewable energy sources.

Alternative Summaries

Table 1 summarizes the major components of Alternatives A and B, and compares the ability of these alternatives to meet the project objectives (the objectives for this project are identified in the *Purpose and Need* chapter). As shown in the following table, Alternative B meets each of the objectives identified for this project, while the No Action Alternative does not address all of the objectives.

Table 1 – Alternatives Summary and Extent to Which Each Alternative Meets Project Objectives

Alternative A – No Action	Alternative B – New Administration Building
A new administration building would not be constructed. The existing farmhouse and administration trailer would continue to be used for administrative purposes with no improvements to structural deficiencies or pest control. The two yurt structures would not be removed and the trail network in the area would not be improved.	A new administration building would be constructed in in close proximity to the existing administration trailer. All employee offices and administrative functions would be consolidated into the new building. The existing administration trailer would be removed off-site. Connected actions include utility connections, construction staging areas, temporary offices, dismantling the two existing yurts, and trail relocation.
Meets Project Objectives?	Meets Project Objectives?
No. Continuing the existing conditions would not provide for an employee work area that meets current health and safety recommendations in terms of the existing building's structural deficiencies and pest problems. Although this alternative provides a convenient location for Monument staff, it does not consolidate all administrative functions into one building because some employee offices would still be located in the farmhouse. This alternative does meet the objective for minimizing impacts to park resources because no construction would be required.	Yes. Constructing a new administration building would provide for an employee work area that meets current health and safety recommendations, particularly with regard to the existing building's structural deficiencies and pest problems. The new building would be situated in convenient location for Monument staff and all administrative functions would be consolidated into the new building. This alternative minimizes environmental impacts to the extent possible, and would not result in impairment to any park resources.

Table 2 summarizes the anticipated environmental impacts for Alternatives A and B. Only those impact topics that have been carried forward for further analysis are included in this table. The *Environmental Consequences* chapter provides a more detailed explanation of these impacts.

Table 2 – Environmental Impact Summary by Alternative

Impact Topic	Alternative A – No Action	Alternative B – Preferred Alternative
Paleontological Resources	No disturbance of paleontological resources.	One petrified wood concentration would be left intact beneath the building resulting in a minor adverse impact. The potential also exists for unknown specimens to be disturbed during excavation activities.
Visitor Use and Experience	No change in existing conditions. Minor adverse impact to visitor use from confusing trail system.	Minor adverse effects resulting from changes to the viewshed, and construction noise/dust. Minor beneficial effects to visitor use from an improved trail system in the project area.
Park Operations	Minor to moderate adverse impacts resulting from employees working in an unsafe environment and additional maintenance required on the structurally deficient buildings.	Minor to moderate to beneficial effects from an improved work environment that meets health and safety standards. Minor adverse impacts from additional time needed to move offices before and after construction of the new building.

Identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which guides the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The CEQ provides direction that “[t]he environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that would promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101:

- fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities; and
- enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternative A, No Action, only minimally meets the above six evaluation factors because it retains facilities that do not meet health and safety standards in terms of structural deficiencies and rodent problems. While it minimizes potential impacts to significant park resources such as paleontological resources, it does not achieve a balance between these resources and the health and safety of Monument staff. Originally intended for use as an interim office facility, the administration trailer has exceeded its usable lifespan. This alternative also does not meet the criteria for improving renewable resources because the existing administration facilities are inefficient with regards to energy and water use.

Alternative B is the environmentally preferred alternative because it best addresses these six evaluation factors. Alternative B, *Construction of a New Administration Building*, would provide a working environment for Monument staff that meets health and safety recommendations, while minimizing environmental impacts to the extent possible. As a permanent facility, the new administration building would be used by future generations. The new building would also be more energy efficient and more environmentally-friendly than the existing administration building. Alternative B would also reduce the NPS backlog of maintenance deficiencies by \$80,000.

No new information came forward from public scoping or consultation with other agencies to necessitate the development of any new alternatives, other than those described and evaluated in this document. Because it meets the Purpose and Need for the project, the project objectives, and is the environmentally preferred alternative, Alternative B is also recommended as the National Park Service Preferred Alternative. For the remainder of the document, Alternative B will be referred to as the Preferred Alternative.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter analyzes the potential environmental consequences, or impacts, that would occur as a result of implementing the proposed project. Topics analyzed in this chapter include paleontological resources, visitor use and experience, and park operations. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, as well as impairment are analyzed for each resource topic carried forward. Potential impacts are described in terms of type, context, duration, and intensity. General definitions are defined as follows, while more specific impact thresholds are given for each resource at the beginning of each resource section.

- **Type** describes the classification of the impact as either beneficial or adverse, direct or indirect:
 - Beneficial: A positive change in the condition or appearance of the resource or a change that moves the resource toward a desired condition.
 - Adverse: A change that moves the resource away from a desired condition or detracts from its appearance or condition.
 - Direct: An effect that is caused by an action and occurs in the same time and place.
 - Indirect: An effect that is caused by an action but is later in time or farther removed in distance, but is still reasonably foreseeable.
- **Context** describes the area or location in which the impact will occur. Are the effects site-specific, local, regional, or even broader?
- **Duration** describes the length of time an effect will occur, either short-term or long-term:
 - Short-term impacts generally last only during construction, and the resources resume their pre-construction conditions following construction.
 - Long-term impacts last beyond the construction period, and the resources may not resume their pre-construction conditions for a longer period of time following construction.
- **Intensity** describes the degree, level, or strength of an impact. For this analysis, intensity has been categorized into negligible, minor, moderate, and major. Because definitions of intensity vary by resource topic, intensity definitions are provided separately for each impact topic analyzed in this Environmental Assessment.

Cumulative Effects: The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, which implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 USC 4321 et seq.), require assessment of cumulative impacts in the decision-making process for federal projects. Cumulative impacts are defined as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions" (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impacts are considered for both the No Action and Preferred Alternatives.

Cumulative impacts were determined by combining the impacts of the Preferred Alternative with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Therefore, it was necessary to identify other ongoing or reasonably foreseeable future projects at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument and, if applicable, the surrounding region. The geographic scope for this analysis includes elements mostly within the Monument's boundaries, while the temporal scope includes projects within a range of approximately ten years. Given this, the following projects were identified for the purpose of conducting the cumulative effects analysis, listed from past to future:

- **Dam Removal, 2002:** Five of the 44 identified earthen dams in Monument were removed. The earthen dams in the Monument were all built by the Soil Conservation Service in the 1930s and 1940s for erosion control and/or water retention. Each of the dams removed crossed a section of valley containing valuable sub-irrigated wet meadows and ranged in height from about 2 to 20 feet. No further dam removal is planned.
- **Improvements to Monument Entrance, Hornbek Homestead, and Barksdale Picnic Area Roads, 2002:** Asphalt was applied to these areas reduce dust, respond to maintenance needs, and enhance visitation.
- **Development of Fire Management Plan, 2002:** The Monument's Fire Management Plan was completed in August 2002. One of the primary actions prescribed by the plan is the reduction of hazardous fuels around the Monument's boundary. The plan calls for treatment of approximately 50 acres of Monument lands each year.
- **Construction of Stump Shelters, 2003:** Permanent shelters were constructed over some of the Monument's primary exposed petrified stumps located near the visitor center in the spring of 2003. As part of this project, a mini-amphitheater was also constructed, as well as some interpretive displays. These shelters are located within close proximity of the existing administration building.
- **Exotic Vegetation Management, Ongoing:** The Monument has been treating its exotic vegetation for the past three years. In fiscal year 2003, over 36 acres in the Monument were treated. Since success is achieved by treating the same areas for 4 to 5 years, future work will focus on maintaining the already treated areas and limiting the number of new areas treated.
- **Teller County Road 1 Rehabilitation, 2004:** Teller County Road 1 runs north-south through the Monument. When the road was initially paved in 1990s, minimal work was done to construct roadbed able to sustain current levels of traffic. This project will provide for a 12" lift of the current roadbed, an additional 3" of pavement, repair some drainage problems, and potentially allow for some safety enhancements within the right-of-way. The road project will scale back some of the steeper embankments on Monument property immediately adjacent to the road right-of-way. Project planning is currently underway and the construction is expected to be completed during 2004.
- **Fence Replacement, 2004-2005:** The Monument's boundary fence is in need of repair in many locations. Park neighbors have reported that in areas where the fence is down has resulted in trespass access by the public across private lands. In fiscal year 2004 the Monument plans to assess the condition of the boundary fence and to make repairs to it in fiscal year 2005.
- **Planning for Visitor Education and Museum Facility, Future:** The Monument has been planning to develop a permanent visitor education/museum and administrative facility since the late 1980s. When the new administrative building is completed, the line-item construction project request will be modified to remove the administrative offices component. At such time that the visitor education and museum facility is completed, the farmhouse that currently provides visitor services will be removed.

Impairment: National Park Service's Management Policies, 2001 require analysis of potential effects to determine whether or not actions would impair park resources (NPS 2000b). The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. National Park Service managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, adversely impacting park resources and values. However, the laws do give the National Park Service the management discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, as long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values.

Although Congress has given the National Park Service the management discretion to allow certain impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement that the National Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired, unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. The prohibited impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible National Park Service manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values. An impact to any park resource or value may constitute an impairment, but an impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment to the extent that it has a major or severe adverse effect upon a resource or value whose conservation is:

1. necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park;
2. key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park; or
3. identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents.

Impairment may result from National Park Service activities in managing the park, visitor activities, or activities undertaken by concessionaires, contractors, and others operating in the park. A determination on impairment is made in the Conclusion section for each of the resource topics carried forward in this chapter.

Paleontological Resources

Intensity Level Definitions

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument was established to research and interpret its excellently preserved fossil flora and fauna and related geologic sites. The methodology used for assessing impacts to paleontological resources are based on the results of the November 2003 paleontological survey in comparison to the areas that would be disturbed or excavated during construction of the new administration building. The thresholds for this impact assessment are as follows:

- Negligible:** The impact to paleontological resources is at the lowest levels of detection, not perceptible and not measurable.
- Minor:** The impact to paleontological resources would be noticeable, but would not alter the integrity of the deposit.
- Moderate:** The impact to paleontological resources would be more noticeable, and may alter the integrity of the deposit.
- Major:** The impact to paleontological resources would be readily apparent, and would alter the integrity of the deposit.
- Impairment:** A major, adverse impact to a resource or value whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the National Monument; or (3) identified as a goal in the National Monument's general management plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents.

Impacts of Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

The No Action Alternative would result in negligible impacts to the paleontological resources at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument because no excavation or disturbance activities would be conducted. The existing administration building would continue to be used as such, and the continued use of this

structure would have negligible effects on the paleontological resources in the area.

Cumulative Effects: Any construction activities that require excavation or ground disturbance have the potential to affect paleontological resources. The stump shelters constructed over some of the primary exposed stumps at the Monument were erected to ultimately protect and preserve the stumps; however, some paleontological materials were disturbed during excavation for this project. Similarly, proposed projects such as fence replacement, road rehabilitation, dam removal, and possible visitor center improvements have the potential for excavation activities which can disturb paleontological deposits. Under this alternative, paleontological resources would not be disturbed; therefore, this project would not cumulatively affect paleontological resources when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Conclusion: The No Action Alternative would result in negligible impacts to paleontological resources because no ground disturbance activities would be conducted. As such, this alternative would not contribute to any cumulative disturbance of paleontological resources, when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Considering these negligible effects, this alternative would not impair paleontological resources.

Impacts of Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)

The Preferred Alternative would result in negligible to potentially minor adverse impacts to paleontological materials from ground disturbance and excavation activities. The results of the paleontological survey conducted in November 2003 showed that two concentrations of paleontological materials are located within the project area, both within proposed footprint of the new administration building. One concentration is situated at a depth of 9-inches while the other concentration is at a depth of 22-inches. The concentration at 9-inches was further examined during the survey to determine its significance and size, and results showed that it does not represent a petrified tree stump. Instead, the concentration is likely a broken branch. The intent is to leave the concentration intact and instead incorporate it into the crawlspace of the structure. This would leave the concentration accessible for future scientific research. The concentration at 22-inches would not be disturbed by construction activities because the depth of excavation for the building foundation is not expected to reach that deep. Therefore, the Preferred Alternative would have a negligible to potentially minor, long-term, adverse effect on the paleontological resources in the project area.

The November 2003 survey was conducted for the entirety of the project area, particularly those areas that would be excavated; however, the potential exists for the presence of other subsurface paleontological deposits that were identified during the survey. Any excavation or ground disturbance activities related to construction of the new administration building or connected activities such as utility relocates have the potential to reveal and disturb unknown paleontological resources. To minimize potential harm to these resources, the Monument's paleontologist would monitor all excavation activities. If a paleontological deposit is discovered during construction, all construction activities would cease until the Monument's paleontologist assesses the resource and determines the appropriate manner in which to proceed.

Cumulative Effects: As described under Alternative A, any construction activities that require excavation or ground disturbance have the potential to affect paleontological resources. The stump shelters constructed over some of the primary exposed stumps at the Monument were erected to ultimately protect and preserve the stumps; however, some paleontological materials were disturbed during excavation for this project. Similarly, proposed projects such as fence replacement, road rehabilitation, dam removal, and possible visitor center improvements have the potential for excavation activities which can disturb paleontological deposits. Impacts associated with the current and future use of the proposed administration building are expected to have a negligible to potentially minor adverse effect on paleontological materials in the Monument. Cumulatively, this would contribute a negligible to minor amount of disturbance to paleontological resources when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Conclusion: The Preferred Alternative would have negligible to potentially minor adverse effects on paleontological resources in the project area as a result of excavation for the foundation of the new administration building. One known paleontological concentration would be incorporated into the building's crawlspace, however, no other known concentrations are expected to be disturbed. No paleontological materials are expected to be disturbed as a result of construction activities for connected actions such as utility connections and trail relocates; however, a monitor would be present to minimize potential disturbance to unknown deposits. Considering these actions, this alternative would contribute a negligible to minor degree of cumulative disturbance to paleontological resources, when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. With these effects being minor or less, this alternative would not impair paleontological resources.

Visitor Use and Experience

Intensity Level Definitions

Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument was established to preserve and protect its paleontological resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. The methodology used for assessing impacts to visitor use and experience is based on how a new administration building would affect the visitor, particularly with regards to the visitors' enjoyment of the Monument's primary resource. The thresholds for this impact assessment are as follows:

- Negligible:** Visitors would not be affected or changes in visitor use and/or experience would be below or at the level of detection. Any effects would be short-term. The visitor would not likely be aware of the effects associated with the alternative.
- Minor:** Changes in visitor use and/or experience would be detectable, although the changes would be slight and likely short-term. The visitor would be aware of the effects associated with the alternative, but the effects would be slight.
- Moderate:** Changes in visitor use and/or experience would be readily apparent and likely long-term. The visitor would be aware of the effects associated with the alternative, and would likely be able to express an opinion about the changes.
- Major:** Changes in visitor use and/or experience would be readily apparent and have substantial long-term consequences. The visitor would be aware of the effects associated with the alternative, and would likely express a strong opinion about the changes.

Impacts of Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

The No Action Alternative would not measurably alter the visitor use and experience because the area around the existing administration building and the visitor center would remain unchanged. In particular, the network of trails in this area would not change, and visitors would continue to use these trails to access the yurt structures, visitor center, stump shelters, and mistakenly the existing administration building. The current confusion caused by these trails would persist as visitors try to locate certain visitor functions such as the yurt structures, resulting in a minor adverse effect to the visitor's experience. The yurt structures would remain erected, with one of them housing an interpretive video for visitors to use. In addition, the visual resources of the area would remain unchanged because no new building would be constructed.

Cumulative Effects: Any construction activities have the potential to affect visitor use and experience. The construction of the stump shelters likely had an adverse effect on the visitor experience as a result of noise, dust, and unavailability to view some of the primary attractions in the Monument. Projects such as road improvements, exotic vegetation management, dam removal, and fence replacement have had or could have an adverse effect on visitor use and experience because of the inconvenience of construction noise, dust, and possible off-limit areas. Ultimately, however, these actions would have or have had a

beneficial effect on visitor use and experience because of long-term improvements to the human health and safety aspects of the Monument; the visual and natural environment; interpretive opportunities; and functionality of the Monument. Potential improvements to the visitor center would also have a beneficial effect on visitor use and experience. Under this alternative, visitor functions in the project area are not expected to change; therefore, cumulatively, visitor use and experience would not appreciably change when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Conclusion: The No Action Alternative would result in primarily negligible effects to visitor use and experience because the features and visitor functions in the project area would not change. This alternative may have a minor, long-term, adverse effect on visitor experience due to the continued confusion of the trail network leading to various visitor facilities in the general area that would not be improved. Cumulatively, this alternative would have a negligible effect on visitor use and experience when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Impacts of Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would create additional space in the farmhouse because the employee offices currently located there would be relocated to the new administration building. Although the function for this newly created space in the farmhouse has yet to be determined, it would likely be used for visitor functions, thereby improving visitor use and experience to a minor degree. Relocation of the Interpretive Yurt to the rear of the farmhouse would also reduce the confusion for visitors as to where to begin their visit. Visitor use and experience would also be improved through the enhancement of the trail network in the project area. These trails are currently used by visitors to access the visitor center, the interpretive yurt structure, and the stump shelters. As part of Preferred Alternative, this trail system would be improved by minimizing the number and reconfiguring the direction of trails so visitors (and employees) can more easily access their destination. These improvements would lessen confusion and provide better cohesion, resulting in a minor to moderate beneficial effect on visitor use and experience.

Minor, temporary, adverse impacts to visitor use and experience would result from construction activities. The project area is currently used by visitors, and during construction, portions of this area would be limited to visitor use. Noise and dust from construction activities would also adversely affect visitor use and experience; however all construction-related impacts would be temporary and cease following construction activities. Dismantling the two yurt structures would also adversely effect the visitor experience to a minor degree because one of these yurts is used by visitors for interpretive purposes (a video presentation). The interpretive opportunities employed by this structure would cease, but may be relocated to the visitor center while the yurts are down. The Monument has yet to determine whether these two yurts would be re-erected following construction of the new administration building. During construction, the existing parking lot would be used by construction crews, thereby reducing the capacity for visitors and employees. To help mitigate this effect, employees and construction crews would be required to park in the back of the lot to ensure easier access for visitors.

Visually, the changes to the project area would have a minor to moderate adverse effect on visitor experience. The location, size, and aesthetics of the new administration building were chosen so as not to visually interfere with visitor center; however, changes to the visual environment would be noticeable. The primary visual changes would result from the removal of the existing administration building; construction of a new administration building in a similar location; removal of the two existing yurt structures; use of a temporary trailer for employee offices located north of the visitor center; reconfiguration of the trail system in the project area; excavation for utility connections; and the temporary presence of construction equipment, materials, and crews. Despite these changes to the visual environment, the new administration building would likely be more visually pleasing to visitors in comparison to the existing administration building.

Cumulative Effects: As described under Alternative A, any construction activities have the potential to affect visitor use and experience. The construction of the stump shelters likely had an adverse effect on the visitor experience as a result of noise, dust, and unavailability to view some of the primary attractions in the Monument. Projects such as road improvements, exotic vegetation management, dam removal,

and fence replacement have had or could have an adverse effect on visitor use and experience because of the inconvenience of construction noise, dust, and possible off-limit areas. Ultimately, however, these actions would have or have had a beneficial effect on visitor use and experience because of long-term improvements to the human health and safety aspects of the Monument; the visual and natural environment; interpretive opportunities; and functionality of the Monument. Potential improvements to the farmhouse would also have a beneficial effect on visitor use and experience. Considering these past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, the minor to moderate beneficial effects of constructing the new administration would have a minor cumulative benefit to the overall visitor use and experience at the Monument.

Conclusion: Under the Preferred Alternative, the enhancement of the trail network and the additional space created in the visitor center would have a minor to moderate beneficial effect on visitor use and experience. Construction disturbances (noise, dust, limited areas) and the dismantling of the yurt structures would have a minor, temporary adverse effect to visitor use and experience. The visual changes to the area from construction of a new building would have a minor to moderate adverse effect on visitor experience because the changes would be readily noticeable. Cumulatively, this alternative would have a minor beneficial effect to visitor use and experience because ultimately this project combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would benefit a number of visitor resources.

Park Operations

Intensity Level Definitions

Implementation of a project can effect the operations of a park such as the number of employees needed; the type of duties that need to be conducted; when/who would conduct these duties; how activities should be conducted; and administrative procedures. For the purpose of this analysis, the human health and safety of park employees is also evaluated. The methodology used to assess potential changes to park operations are defined as follows:

- Negligible:** Park operations would not be affected or the effect would be at or below the lower levels of detection, and would not have an appreciable effect on park operations.
- Minor:** The effect would be detectable, but would be of a magnitude that would not have an appreciable adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. If mitigation were needed to offset adverse effects, it would be relatively simple and successful.
- Moderate:** The effects would be readily apparent and would result in a substantial adverse or beneficial change in park operations in a manner noticeable to staff and the public. Mitigation measures would probably be necessary to offset adverse effects and would likely be successful.
- Major:** The effects would be readily apparent and would result in a substantial adverse or beneficial change in park operations in a manner noticeable to staff and the public, and be markedly different from existing operations. Mitigation measures to offset adverse effects would be needed, could be expensive, and their success could not be guaranteed.

Impacts of Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

The No Action Alternative would not measurably change current park operations at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The existing administration building would continue to function as such, and the employee offices located in the visitor center would remain there. Employees would continue to work in two different buildings, which poses a minor inconvenience in terms of communication, sharing the one kitchen facility in the existing administration trailer and meeting with other employees.

The existing administration facilities contain numerous structural deficiencies, which could potentially endanger the employees. Over time, these structural deficiencies would also require the expertise and time of the maintenance crew to repair, which increases the current workload of these employees. The building also has a rodent infestation problem which poses the potential threat of employees contracting diseases carried by the rodents. In time, these health and safety problems could have a minor to moderate adverse effect on the employees. Also, under this alternative, the two yurt structures would remain standing and their functions would remain the same.

Cumulative Effects: Any project that occurs in the Monument has an effect on park operations; therefore, most of the actions listed in the cumulative scenario in the introduction of this chapter would have some degree of effect on employees and park operations. Planning projects such as the development of a Fire Management Plan and planning for improvements to the visitor center typically involve the majority of Monument staff to contribute their expertise and assistance. Resource management projects such as exotic vegetation management, dam removal would primarily involve resources staff. Fence replacement would primarily involve the maintenance staff. Visitor contact, interpretation, and safety activities usually involve rangers and interpretive specialists. Under this alternative, park operations associated with the current and future use of the existing administration building are not expected change; therefore, park operations would not appreciably change when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Conclusion: The No Action Alternative would not measurably change current park operations because the existing administration building would continue to function as such. The impact; however, of increased maintenance to repair structural deficiencies in the existing administration building coupled with the lack of employee consolidation and the health and safety issues related to the rodent problems would have a minor to moderate adverse effect on park operations and employee health and safety. Cumulatively, these effects would have a negligible impact to park operations when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Impacts of Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)

The construction of a new administration building under Preferred Alternative would provide a working environment for Monument employees that meets current health and safety standards. Structural deficiencies associated with the existing administration building would not be present in the new building. Because of the improved integrity of the building, maintenance crews would likely have a lighter work load than if the existing administration building were to continue to be used. Similarly, the new administration building would remedy the rodent infestation problem that the existing administration building has. The new building would be more secure and less apt to allow rodents to enter, thereby improving the working conditions for all employees. These impacts would have a moderate beneficial effect on the health and safety of employees and the efficiency of park operations.

Other changes related to the new administration building would also provide for an improved working environment for Monument employees. The employee offices currently located in the visitor center would be relocated to the new administration building, which would consolidate all employees into one location. Likewise, the new administration building would provide improved work areas for employees including handicapped accessible office space, general work areas, a breakroom, and storage space. Light, ventilation, heating, and air quality would also be improved in the new administration building. Further, the improved trail network would provide safer and easier access to the facilities in the project area. These effects would have a minor to moderate benefit on employee communication, cohesion, and efficiency.

During construction, employee offices would be relocated to a temporary trailer on the north side of the administration facilities. All employee furniture and possessions from the existing administration trailer would have to be moved to the temporary trailer and again into the new administration building when it is completed. These moves would temporarily disrupt employee efficiency to a minor degree. The typical work load for employees would also be increased during implementation of this project from the need to

finalize project plans, hire contractors, and monitor construction. Once the new administration building is constructed, normal work loads and patterns should return. Construction noise and dust may also adversely affect the Monument's employees, but these inconveniences would be temporary, lasting only as long as construction.

Under this alternative, the two yurt structures would be dismantled, which would take additional time and energy of various staff members. One of the yurt structures currently serves as an interim paleontological storage facility. When this yurt is removed, employees would be required to move and store the materials located in this yurt in a different location. Also, if the Monument decides to re-erect these two yurts, additional staff time and effort would be required in the future.

Cumulative Effects: As described under Alternative A, any project that occurs in the Monument has an effect on park operations; therefore, most of the actions listed in the cumulative scenario in the introduction of this chapter would have some degree of effect on employees and park operations. Planning projects such as the development of a Fire Management Plan and planning for improvements to the visitor center typically involve the majority of Monument staff to contribute their expertise and assistance. Resource management projects such as exotic vegetation management and dam removal would involve the resource management staff, fence replacement would primarily involve the maintenance staff. Visitor contact, interpretation, and safety activities usually involve rangers and interpretive specialists. Park operations associated with the current and future use of the new administration building would be improved to a moderate degree, which would cumulatively have a minor beneficial impact to park operations when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Conclusion: Construction of a new administration building under the Preferred Alternative would have a minor to moderate benefit on employees at the Monument because the new building would provide a safer and healthier work environment, as well as provide for all employees to be consolidated into one building. The new building would rectify the structural deficiencies and rodent problems associated with the existing administration trailer. Adverse effects to park operations would occur during construction which would require employees to move offices and manage the construction of the project. Cumulatively, the improvements associated with this alternative would have a minor beneficial effect on park operations when considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

External Scoping

External (public) scoping was conducted to inform various agencies and the public about the proposal to construct a new administration building at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument and to generate input on the preparation of this Environmental Assessment. This effort was initiated with the distribution of a scoping letter which was bulk-mailed to over 150 residents in the Florissant, Woodland Park, Divide, and Cripple Creek areas. All adjacent landowners on the Monument's mailing list database were included in the mailing. In addition, the scoping letter was sent to local news organizations, and it was posted on the Monument's internet website. With this press release, the public was given 30 days to comment on the project beginning October 17, 2003.

In addition to the aforementioned public entities, the following agencies and Native American tribes were sent scoping information or were contacted for information regarding the project:

Federal Agencies

U.S. Department of the Interior – Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies

Colorado Historical Society (office of the State Historic Preservation Officer)
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Affiliated Native American Groups

Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Jicarilla Apache Nation
Uintah and Ouray Tribal Business Committee
Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council
Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes
Comanche Nation
Kiowa Tribe

In response to the scoping letter, a local newspaper - *Colorado Springs Gazette* - published a page-one article based on information contained in the letter and provided by the Monument. The article focused exclusively on the rodent infestation issue and failed to describe the numerous maintenance deficiencies in the current administration building. As a result, many of the public comments that the Monument received were in reaction to the article and reflected the narrow focus of the article.

During the 30-day scoping period, approximately twenty-two responses were received from the public through letters, telephone calls, and visitor contact. Some responses questioned the need for a new building if the rodents could be exterminated using biological, chemical, or physical controls. Other responses recommended various pest control companies to assist with the rodent problem. As previously mentioned, many of these comments were a reflection of the newspaper article that focused primarily on the rodent problem. Once it was explained to the public (via phone calls and visitor contact) that there are other reasons for constructing a new building (particularly structural deficiencies in the existing administration building), most were in favor of the project. Other responses were neutral with regards to constructing a new building and/or simply wanted clarification about the project.

In addition to the twenty-two public responses, two Native American tribes responded including the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. No other federal or state agencies responded during the scoping period. Both of the tribes that responded affirmed their affiliation with the project area and stated that they do not anticipate impacts to Native American sites or resources. They had no objection to the proposed project, and requested to be kept informed of the project's progress, including immediate notification if Native American materials are discovered during construction.

Internal Scoping

Internal scoping was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of professionals from Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument and the Intermountain Support Office. Interdisciplinary team members met on September 30, 2003 to discuss the purpose and need for the project; various alternatives; potential environmental impacts; past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects that may have cumulative effects; and possible mitigation measures. The team also gathered background information and discussed public outreach for the project. Over the course of the project, team members have conducted individual site visits to view and evaluate the proposed construction site. The results of the September 2003 meeting are documented in this Environmental Assessment.

Environmental Assessment Review and List of Recipients

The Environmental Assessment will be released for public review in January 2003. To inform the public of the availability of the Environmental Assessment, the National Park Service will publish and distribute a letter or press release to various agencies, tribes, and members of the public on the National Monument's mailing list, as well as place an ad in the local newspaper. Copies of the Environmental Assessment will be provided to interested individuals, upon request. Copies of the document will also be available for review at the Monument's visitor center and on the internet at www.nps.gov/flfo.

The Environmental Assessment is subject to a 30-day public comment period ending February 18, 2004. During this time, the public is encouraged to submit their written comments to the National Park Service address provided at the beginning of this document. Following the close of the comment period, all public comments will be reviewed and analyzed, prior to the release of a decision document. The National Park Service will issue responses to substantive comments received during the public comment period, and will make appropriate changes to the Environmental Assessment, as needed.

List of Preparers

Preparers (developed EA content):

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- Herb Meyer, Paleontologist
- Rick Wilson, Chief Ranger
- Ken Springer, Facility Manager

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- CHS 2003 Colorado Historical Society (State Historic Preservation Officer), letter affirming a determination of “no historic properties affected” for the project, dated December 16, 2003.
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- USFWS 2004 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, letter concurring that no threatened or endangered species would be adversely affected by the project, date January 15, 2004.